

United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine

Hearing on Bus and Truck Transportation Security

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Peter J. Pantuso and I am the President and CEO of the American Bus Association. The ABA would like to thank you Mr. Chairman for your leadership in convening this hearing and we appreciate the opportunity to testify on this urgent matter. The ABA is the national trade association for the intercity motorcoach industry. It is comprised of approximately 3400 member companies that operate buses and provide related services to the motorcoach industry. Our members operate 40-45 foot touring style coaches with baggage bays under a passenger compartment. Nearly all of the operator members provide charter, tour or commuter service and some 100 of ABA member companies provide regular route scheduled service. The American motorcoach industry is large, diverse and ever changing. Our operator members are large and small; provide local, regional and national services; and are saddled with a variety of operational challenges. Greyhound, the largest scheduled service member provides service to 2,500 destinations and 25 million passengers a year. Coach USA, the nation's largest motorcoach company operates over 4,000 coaches, while most of the industry operates fewer than 10 motorcoaches. DOTS Motorcoaches, one of our smaller members provides service to and from Daytona Airport. Still other members provide service to communities with no other form of intercity transportation. Another

2,500 ABA members include representatives of the travel and tourism industries, and the manufacturers and suppliers of products and services for the motorcoach industry.

All together, ABA members provide all manner of bus service to 774 million U.S. passengers annually. A number that is more than double the number of passengers carried by all the U.S. airlines and Amtrak combined. In fact, we move more people in two weeks than Amtrak moves in a year. We move this many passengers while compiling the best safety record of any mode of commercial transportation. Last year there were three fatalities on intercity buses. The country's intercity bus industry provides affordable public transportation to over 4,000 communities nationwide. The bus industry is a critical link in the nation's transportation chain. Since the September 11th attack on New York City and Washington, D.C. our members have provided service from airports to other destinations including service to Amtrak and commuter rail stations as well as to other bus terminals; aiding military mobilization by providing transportation to military personnel under contract with United States armed forces; emergency transportation service for police and fire rescue efforts in New York City and free motorcoach service to those who wished to attend the memorial services for the fallen New York City police and fire fighters. These services are provided primarily by an industry of small businessmen and women.

Since the September 11th terrorist attack on the United States and the criminal assault on a Greyhound bus in Tennessee on October 3rd, members of the ABA have worked hard to enhance the safety of the traveling public and instill a greater sense of security in our customers. ABA members have increased security both in and around bus terminals though the use of additional personnel, greater use of surveillance cameras, baggage coordination programs to match passengers with baggage, providing buses with the ability to communicate threats to terminals or offices and, in Greyhound's operations, the use of hand held sensing devices three of its larger terminals. In addition, the industry is taking steps to evaluate the need and desirability of further security measures.

The week after September 11th saw the ABA staff begin an intensive series of discussions to review bus operations from a security standpoint. These discussions led to

meetings including representatives from bus operators and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) officials. In the four weeks since the attack ABA has formed a security committee within the Bus Industry Safety Council (BISC) to evaluate security measures now in use by one or more carriers for their fitness for any segment of the industry. I would like to focus my testimony on ABA's preliminary assessment on the state of the industry's security and how it may be improved in the shortest possible time.

Let me begin with one inescapable fact. We don't know the full extent of the vulnerability of the bus transportation system or fully understand what it would take to close the gaps in the security net. While criminal activity such as that on the Greyhound bus on October 3rd is troublesome but fortunately rare, I am aware of no incident in which a bus in the United States has been used for terrorist activity. Nor has any law enforcement official ever informed ABA of such a threat. However, the bus industry's sterling safety record does not justify complaisance.

While we do not know the extent of the security needs of the United States motorcoach industry; we do know that the motorcoach industry is part of the ground transportation network and in the case of the scheduled service fixed route operations, the industry generally provides operator access to facilities and terminals. For that reason, I believe that a federally funded task force of the ground transportation industry – intercity and metro transit, charter and tour operators, manufacturers, labor, federal transportation and security officials and law enforcement personnel – should be formed to undertake this responsibility. The task force should have a mandate to report to the Congress and the Administration on the state of the service transportation system and should identify areas where security can be improved throughout the ground transportation system.

Assessing the threat will not be easy. The bus industry is a fluid system accessible from many points. Bus companies providing scheduled service out of terminals will have different security challenges than operators that provide charter and tour service that take pre-formed groups sightseeing, boarding passengers at schools or clubs, and both types of operators will have different problems from those operators who pick up passengers on street corners or hotel

lobbies providing commuter service or airport shuttles. It goes without saying that it will be impossible to apply one security solution to the entire industry.

It is readily apparent to me that the bus transportation system will require federal financial support to ensure that the traveling public is protected from attacks of any type. This is so for at least three reasons. First, as I stated earlier, the industry is one of small businessmen and women. In some years, the profit for the entire industry does not reach \$40 million dollars. No bus operator has the wherewithal to fund a host of security upgrades. Second, heightened security concerns will add financial pressure to an industry already reeling from the sharp downturn in travel and tourism brought on by the events of September 11th. Since the attacks, in the sightseeing, charter and tour portion of the industry, it is estimated that customers may have cancelled about 500,000 trips a day and approximately 20,000 jobs in that segment of the industry have been lost or idled. Most charter and tour operators report losses of between 20 and 80 percent of their pre-September 11th revenue. Moreover, the fall season is “peak” season for most of our members that operate charter and tour service. It is a time when seniors frequently travel. Without the cushion the autumn brings, many companies will be out of business in January and February when there are no tours and there is no money in the bank and cash flow is non-existent. (By contrast however, the scheduled service business seems fairly level as compared to pre September 11th levels). While the regular route segment was not hurt as badly by the September 11th attacks and the October 3rd event, these actions may cause decreases in that segment as well. Third, none of the security “fixes” that we at ABA have studied can be called easy, cheap or quick.

With these facts in mind we have some preliminary recommendations for the Committee. To begin, the federal government should provide some financial aid. I see the need for two types of support. First, I recommend the establishment of a security program similar to the federal Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP). This program would provide money to the states for a competitive grant program that private, over-the-road bus companies could apply for to enhance security in their operations. Second, I recommend that there be a nationwide bus transportation support program, which would focus on funding the system wide

approaches, like those I will suggest for the bus industry.

In speaking for and of the bus industry, I believe the security issue can be usefully divided into three categories: bus operations, bus terminals and the buses themselves, with my initial focus on fixed route scheduled service. I begin with bus operations because this is the largest category of issues and it also encompasses parts of the other categories. An issue that should be studied is whether there is a need to strengthen security practices relating to bus and transportation facility employee recruitment. Company employees and bus terminal vendors might be subject to criminal background and security checks. Related to this is the issue of whether identification cards should be required of employees and inspected by security personnel. Many companies have indicated that they are beginning this process, in part to provide added comfort to their customers. A third issue is whether the process of obtaining a Commercial Drivers' License (CDL) should also include security checks and the information shared with state and federal law enforcement officials.

The need for training of bus and other transportation personnel to recognize and respond to security threats is another matter that should be considered in the security review we propose. There has been no formal or industry-wide training in the area of threat recognition, particularly vulnerable areas or evacuation procedures. Such training could be available to everyone in the industry including owners, safety directors, drivers, mechanics, transportation police officials, as well as reservation clerks, and baggage handlers.

The industry task force also needs to address the compilation of the best practices for countering terrorist threats. We must know what practices have worked for those nations and transportation facilities that have dealt with such problems. Best practices would give us some idea of how security could be enhanced in what circumstance; namely, whether security would be enhanced by uniform policies concerning weapons on buses; controls on package express service; rules for access to airports by motorcoach shuttle operators or the use of passenger manifest lists to identify passengers (*e.g.*, Greyhound's TRIPS program) utilizing intercity regular route service.

The development of best practices is further complicated by the fluid nature of bus

operations and facilities. Some terminals are little more than stops at gas stations, drug stores, etc. Most bus passengers are on charters, tours, shuttles or commuter trips. Any security practices will have to be flexible to include as many types of operations as possible. We need to work cooperatively with all transportation modes to determine these practices and give their use the widest possible distribution. The federal government must play a critical role here by not only creating the task force we are proposing, but also funding efforts at which there can be exchanges of ideas on these matters.

One area that warrants particular concern is the vulnerability of transportation terminals. In addition to training terminal personnel, thought should be given to providing terminals with emergency communications capabilities tied to law enforcement agencies. Larger terminals may require secured waiting areas for ticketed passengers. One approach may be to have a system of “wandering” the passengers and their carry-on baggage in these areas. These areas would also be off-limits to those without tickets. The development of best practices guidelines for terminals and for handling baggage and package express would be of some help.

Besides these steps in terminal security, the question of the use of equipment both to screen passengers and to screen baggage placed on board motorcoaches should be addressed. Although it is an issue that should be examined, there are reasons why metal detectors may have limited usefulness in the bus industry. First, there are over 4,000 communities served by intercity buses, many of which have gas stations, drug stores, or hotel lobbies that also serve as bus terminals. Second, most terminals have immediate street access through multiple doors and gates. Third, the cost, dimensions and weight of such scanners make them inappropriate in most terminals. It may be that alternative security measures, along the lines of those described above, will be more effective in bus terminals. Another issue for consideration is the use of bomb sniffing dogs in and around the largest terminals.

The use of the bus as a weapon of mass destruction (WMD) may not be likely. Larger commercial vehicles with larger compartments for storage are more likely to be used as WMDs. The larger threat is that the bus could serve as a target for terrorist activities. Besides the issues of driver documentation and baggage handling, another issue is whether the bus itself needs to

be made safer. One strong possibility is a communications system in each bus that would allow the driver to tie into police, emergency or mobilization efforts with a communication that provides automatically the location of the bus. The ABA agrees with the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) that such communications systems would be effective in preventing or limiting bus hijackings and other incidents. The technology for such a system exists, but vendors have not found it cost-effective to develop the system itself. Another technological issue that may yield some benefit is the use of cameras on buses, perhaps with remote monitoring. Federal leadership in developing this system is needed.

Another approach that could be implemented is a wider installation of a system like the Greyhound TRIPS system, which provides name identification and trip itinerary for all passengers. Currently, Greyhound has a system in place to collect passenger names in locations that account for 85% of its passenger traffic, but few, if any, of the carriers that interline with Greyhound have such a system because the infrastructure costs are too high. This would be a prime area for an immediate federal investment.

Two other possibilities that appear to require some research are efforts to enhance motorcoach safety. This may be possible by protecting the driver by compartmentalizing the driver area. Research into the possibility of the installation of an engine “kill” switch on buses to immobilize them when the switch is activated should also be undertaken. The feasibility and use of such technology and the possible re-engineering of buses are expensive and longer-term ideas. Again, federal cooperation will be required for our industry if any of these ideas prove worthy.

The issue of research is one that crosses all lines in our quest to make travelers’ safer. There are advantages to the federal government funding research into or facilitating the dissemination of promising security applications to the transportation modes. New applications such as detectors that are effective against non-metal weapons and plastic explosives and the use of biometric identification systems are now available. Whether such devices are appropriate or necessary is an issue for resolution, as well as the issue of whether off-the-shelf baggage scanners and metal detectors would be effective. In addition, the quest for security should be

ongoing. The bus industry taskforce I mentioned earlier or an office within FMCSA could be required to coordinate and facilitate the dissemination of the research to the terminal operators, bus operators and law enforcement agencies who will need it.

The federal government should also begin to look at ways in which bus transportation can supplement air transportation, particularly given the delays now inevitable in air travel. Some ideas from the perspective of the bus industry are: essential bus service, similar to essential air service, to rural communities; and expansion of existing federal preemption of state controls over bus operations to reach the operation of regular route services within a state; MCSAP or FTA security grants or small business administration loans to operators to make security upgrades; or the federal government underwriting the “war risk” clause in bus operators’ insurance policies, which is being used to cancel bus operators’ insurance and ending service. Another way to allow buses to supplement existing service is the establishment of a communications link between localities needing service. Regulatory barriers should not now stand in the way of expeditiously offering new motorcoach services that the public may demand.

In light of the terrorists’ attacks on the United States just a month ago, it seems almost trite to say that these, and other issues, must be decided quickly. There is nothing more important to the national interest today. The intercity bus industry will do everything that it can to help the country through this crisis. Working together with the federal government and the other modes of transportation, I have every confidence that we will provide security for the American traveling public. Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to be here. I will answer any question the members of the Committee have for me.